

Name:
Teacher:
Class:
Date:

Directions:

Read the Encyclopedia entry about the Russian Revolution and complete the following annotations as you go.

- 1.) Write the main ideas of each paragraph in the RIGHT margin. Be sure to include all of the main points within the paragraph. These do not need to be written in complete sentences.
- 2.) Choose at least two vocabulary words from each paragraph, look up their definitions, and write the definitions in the LEFT margin. Chose words that are most critical to helping you comprehend the text.

The Columbia Encyclopedia, Sixth Edition. 2001-07.

Russian Revolution

Russian Revolution—violent upheaval in Russia in 1917 that overthrew the czarist government. 1

Causes

The revolution was the culmination of a long period of repression and unrest. From the time of [Peter I](#) (Peter the Great), the czardom increasingly became an autocratic bureaucracy that imposed its will on the people by force, with wanton disregard for human life and liberty. As Western technology was adopted by the czars, Western humanitarian ideals were acquired by a group of educated Russians. Among this growing intelligentsia, the majority of whom were abstractly humanitarian and democratic, there were also those who were politically radical and even revolutionary. The university became a seat of revolutionary activity; [nihilism](#), [anarchism](#), and later [Marxism](#) were espoused and propagated. 2

The reforms of [Alexander II](#) brought the emancipation of the serfs (1861; see [Emancipation, Edict of](#)) and opened the way for industrial development. However, emancipation imposed harsh economic conditions on the peasants and did not satisfy their need for farmland. Industrialization concentrated people in urban centers, where the exploited working class was a receptive audience for radical ideas. A reactionary and often ignorant clergy kept religion static and persecuted religious dissenters. Pogroms were instituted against the Jews, which turned many radical Jews to [Zionism](#). Non-Russian nationalities in the empire were repressed. 3

By 1903, Russia was divided into several political groups. The autocracy was upheld by the landed nobility and the higher clergy; the capitalists desired a constitutional monarchy; the liberal bourgeoisie made up the bulk of the group that later became the Constitutional Democratic party; peasants and intelligentsia were incorporated into the [Socialist Revolutionary party](#); and the workers, influenced by Marxism, were represented in the Bolshevik and Menshevik wings of the Social Democratic Labor party (see [Bolshevism and Menshevism](#)).

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The Revolution of 1905

The Russian Revolution of 1905 began in St. Petersburg on Jan. 22 (Jan. 9, O.S.) when troops fired on a defenseless crowd of workers, who, led by a priest, were marching to the Winter Palace to petition Czar [Nicholas II](#). This “bloody Sunday” was followed in succeeding months by a series of strikes, riots, assassinations, naval mutinies, and peasant outbreaks. These disorders, coupled with the disaster of the [Russo-Japanese War](#) (1904–5), which revealed the corruption and incompetence of the czarist regime, forced the government to promise the establishment of a consultative [duma](#), or assembly, elected by limited franchise. Nonetheless, unsatisfied popular demands provoked a general strike, and in a manifesto issued in October the czar granted civil liberties and a representative [duma](#) to be elected democratically.

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The manifesto split the groups that collectively had brought about the revolution. Those who were satisfied with the manifesto formed the Octobrist party. The liberals who wanted more power for the [duma](#) consolidated in the Constitutional Democratic party. The Social Democrats, who had organized a [soviet](#), or workers’ council, at St. Petersburg, attempted to continue the strike movement and compel social reforms. The government arrested the [soviet](#) and put down (Dec., 1905) a workers’ insurrection in Moscow.

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When order was restored, the czar promulgated the Fundamental Laws, under which the power of the [duma](#) was limited. Some attempt at economic reform was made by the czar’s minister, [Stolypin](#), but his efforts failed. At the same time [Stolypin](#) ruthlessly suppressed the revolutionary movement. When [World War I](#) broke out in 1914, most elements of Russia (except the Bolsheviks) united in supporting the war effort. However, the repeated military reverses, the acute food shortages, the appointment of inept ministers, and the intense suffering of the civilian population created a revolutionary climate by the end of 1916. The sinister influence of [Rasputin](#) over Czarina [Alexandra Feodorovna](#), whom Nicholas had left in charge of the government when he took personal command of the armed forces in 1915, destroyed all support for the czar except among extreme reactionaries.

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The February Revolution of 1917

By Mar., 1917 (the end of Feb., 1917, O.S., thus the name February Revolution), most of the workers in Petrograd (St. Petersburg) and Moscow were striking and rioting for higher food rations. Many of the soldiers refused to suppress the insurgents; military

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insubordination and mutiny spread. Nicholas II ineffectually sought to put down the workers by force and also dissolved (Mar. 11, N.S./Feb. 26, O.S.) the Duma. The Duma refused to obey, and the Petrograd insurgents took over the capital. Nicholas was forced to abdicate (Mar. 15, N.S./Mar. 2, O.S.) at Pskov after the Duma had appointed a provisional government composed mainly of moderates; it was headed by Prince [Lvov](#) and included [Milyukov](#) and [Kerensky](#).

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Although most Russians welcomed the end of autocracy, that was the only point on which they agreed. The provisional government had little popular support, and its authority was limited by the Petrograd workers' and soldiers' soviet, which controlled the troops, communications, and transport. The soviet furthered the military breakdown by establishing soldiers' committees throughout the army and making officership elective.

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Despite its strength, the soviet at first did not openly seize power; the Socialist Revolutionaries and Mensheviks who initially dominated it believed that at this stage of the revolution the bourgeois provisional government should rule. The government's program called for a general amnesty, broad civil liberties, and a constituent assembly to be elected by universal suffrage. This failed to address two burning issues—continuation of the war and redistribution of land. The government announced that the question of land distribution could only be handled by the future constituent assembly.

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In March the soviet demanded peace. Milyukov, the foreign minister, was forced to resign in May after demonstrations against his insistence on continuing the war. The cabinet was reorganized and several other socialists, in addition to Kerensky, were added. Kerensky took over as minister of war, and Viktor [Chernov](#), a Socialist Revolutionary, became minister of agriculture.

The October Revolution of 1917

In Apr., 1917, [Lenin](#) and other revolutionaries returned to Russia after having been permitted by the German government to cross Germany. The Germans hoped that the Bolsheviks would undermine the Russian war effort. Lenin galvanized the small and theretofore cautious Bolshevik party into action. The courses he advocated were simplified into the powerful slogans "end the war," "all land to the peasants," and "all power to the soviets."

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The failure of the all-out military offensive in July increased discontent with the provisional government, and disorders and violence in Petrograd led to popular demands for the soviet to seize power. The Bolsheviks assumed direction of this movement, but the soviet still held back. The government then took strong measures against the Bolshevik press and leaders. Nevertheless, the position of the provisional government was precarious.

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Prince Lvov resigned in July because of his opposition to Chernov's cautious attempts at land reform. He was replaced by Kerensky, who formed a coalition cabinet with a socialist majority. Army discipline deteriorated after the failure of the July offensive. The provisional government and the Menshevik and Socialist Revolutionary leaders in the soviet lost support from the impatient soldiers and workers, who turned to the Bolsheviks.

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Although the Bolsheviks were a minority in the first all-Russian congress of soviets (June), they continued to gain influence. Conservative and even some moderate elements, who wished to limit the power of the soviets, rallied around General [Kornilov](#), who attempted (September, N.S./August, O.S.) to seize Petrograd by force. At Kerensky's request, the Bolsheviks and other socialists came to the defense of the provisional government and the attempt was put down. From mid-September on the Bolsheviks had a majority in the Petrograd soviet, and Lenin urged the soviet to seize power.

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On the night of Nov. 6 (Oct. 24, O.S.), the Bolsheviks staged an coup, engineered by [Trotsky](#); aided by the workers' Red Guard and the sailors of Kronstadt, they captured the government buildings and the Winter Palace in Petrograd. A second all-Russian congress of soviets met and approved the coup after the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries walked out of the meeting. A cabinet, known as the Council of People's Commissars, was set up with Lenin as chairman, Trotsky as foreign commissar, [Rykov](#) as interior commissar, and Stalin as commissar of nationalities. The second congress immediately called for cessation of hostilities, gave private and church lands to village soviets, and abolished private property.

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Moscow was soon taken by force, and local groups of Bolshevik workers and soldiers gained control of most of the other cities of Russia. The remaining members of the provisional government were arrested (Kerensky had fled the country). Old marriage and divorce laws were discarded, the church was attacked, workers' control was introduced into the factories, the banks were nationalized, and a supreme economic council was formed to run the economy. The long-promised constituent assembly met in Jan., 1918, but its composition being predominantly non-Bolshevik. it was soon disbanded by Bolshevik troops. The Cheka (political police), directed by [Dzerzhinsky](#), was set up to liquidate the opposition.

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Negotiations with the Central powers, which had begun late in 1917, resulted in the Russian acceptance (Mar., 1918) of the humiliating Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (see [Brest-Litovsk, Treaty of](#)). Most of the lands ceded to Germany under the treaty were home to non-Russian nationalities. The ceded lands and Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan had proclaimed their independence from Russia after the Bolshevik coup. Following Germany's defeat by the Allies and the withdrawal of German troops, the Bolsheviks regained some of the lost territory (Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan) during the Russian civil war.

The Civil War of 1918–20

The civil war between the Bolsheviks (Reds) and the anti-Bolsheviks (Whites) ravaged Russia until 1920. The Whites represented all shades of anti-Communist groups, including members of the constituent assembly. Several of their leaders favored setting up a military dictatorship, but few were outspoken czarists.

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Armed opposition to the Soviet regime centered at first in the south, where the volunteers under Kornilov (succeeded by [Denikin](#)) joined forces with the [Don Cossacks](#). The [Ukraine](#) was the scene of fighting after the Germans evacuated it following the general armistice of Nov. 11, 1918; it was seized by the Bolsheviks (early 1919), by Denikin's forces (Aug.–Dec., 1919), again by the Bolsheviks (Dec., 1919), and finally by the Poles (May, 1920), with whom war had broken out over the Russo-Polish frontier question. Denikin in the meantime had turned over his command to General P. N. [Wrangel](#), who after the conclusion of the Russo-Polish armistice was driven by the Bolsheviks into the Crimea and was obliged to evacuate his forces to Constantinople (Nov., 1920).

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The civil war in the east was equally fatal to the Whites. A government was organized at Samara by a group of Socialist Revolutionaries who had been members of the constituent assembly. It received the support of the [Czech Legion](#), which controlled the Trans-Siberian RR, but it merged (Sept., 1918) with a more conservative government set up at Omsk, in Siberia, and a few weeks later fell under the dictatorship of Admiral [Kolchak](#). Although at first successful, Kolchak's forces were eventually driven to the Russian Far East; by Jan., 1920, all Siberia except [Vladivostok](#) and some other Far Eastern territory was in Bolshevik hands.

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The civil war was complicated by Allied intervention. In N Russia, British, French, and American forces occupied (Mar., 1918) Murmansk and later Arkhangelsk with the stated purpose of protecting Allied stores against possible seizure by the Germans; they were evacuated only in Nov., 1919. In the Russian Far East the Allies occupied Vladivostok, which the Japanese held until 1922.

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The Bolshevik military victory was due partly to the lack of cooperation among the various White commanders and partly to the remarkable reorganization of the Red forces after Trotsky became commissar for war. It was won, however, only at the price of immense sacrifice; Russia by 1920 was ruined and devastated. Atrocities were committed throughout the civil war by both sides.

For the history of Russia after the civil war, see [Union of Soviet Socialist Republics](#) and [Lenin, Vladimir Ilyich](#).

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Bibliography

See L. Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution* (tr. 1932); E. H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917–1923* (3 vol., 1950–53); R. Medvedev, *The October Revolution* (1985); L. Schapiro, *The Russian Revolution of 1917* (1986); W. B. Lincoln, *Red Victory* (1990); O. Figes, *The People's Tragedy* (1997).

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